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ABSTRACT

Recent trends in composition research indicate that attention has turned away from the parts of the writing product toward the steps involved in the writing process. There are two common threads to this research: (1) writing has a number of distinct stages including prewriting, writing, and editing, and (2) errors are a natural part of learning, and are often an indication of progress and growth, rather than of a mistake that needs to be eradicated. Trends in evaluation of written composition include a return to the use of the writing sample, scored holistically, or for "primary traits" (a system developed for the National Assessment of Educational Progress). Another important trend in teaching writing involves inservice education programs, such as the Bay Area Writing Project, that seek to involve the teachers in writing themselves and thereby aid in their understanding of the writing process. (MKM)

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Trends in Written Composition

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Trends in Written Composition

This paper began in response to an invitation to talk about trends in oral and written composition—and the interest reflected in the invitation is in itself probably the most significant new trend. For the first time in many years, serious attention is being given both to basic research and to curriculum development in these areas. In the 1978 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Congress voted to include oral and written composition among the areas eligible to receive funds. The National Institute of Education has begun to systematically fund projects to investigate writing instruction. Educational Testing Service has restored a writing sample to its college entrance examinations. Even the International Reading Association has begun to include sessions on writing in its conferences, and has published a book about the teaching of writing in the elementary school.

Which is not to say that oral and written composition have finally come of age. Teacher preparation still puts little stress on writing and many experienced teachers feel uncomfortable in their level of expertise; schools are still full of specialists who can help with remedial reading but who know little about how to approach writing problems; there is still little consensus about what the ideal program for the teaching of writing would be like, at any instructional level; and the level of funding for writing research, though orders of magnitude greater than even three years ago, is still only a fraction of the level of funding in reading.

This new concern with writing has had a number of causes. Public concern about falling test scores, with all of the attendant implications about

the nation's literacy, has played a major part. This has been reinforced by the high visibility of mechanical errors in writing: it is easy for an employer or a newspaper editor or a college professor to count up mistakes in spelling or usage and wave them about to show how poorly educated today's graduates are. Contrast that with the privacy in which we make mistakes when we are reading to ourselves, or the transience of a misspoken word or incomplete sentence in our conversations.

Most of the complaints about the current state of writing instruction--as well as about the general literacy of the nation--are misinformed. Teachers today are just as dedicated as they were in the "old days," they are much better trained, and comparatively are about as underpaid as they have always been. We are not in the position of struggling just to get back to where we once were.

But the new public and governmental concern with communication, both oral and written, provides an opportunity which we should seize to make real advances in our knowledge about writing; and we can use that knowledge to improve our teaching practice.

I will begin with a discussion of some recent trends in composition research, then turn to approaches to large-scale evaluation of student writing, and finally mention some trends in inservice training. As will quickly become apparent, I am really only dealing with half of my original brief--written composition--because it is the area in which I am most directly involved.

First, recent trends in composition research.

A good starting point in considering trends in composition is a now-classic summary of research published by the National Council of Teachers of English in 1963. Written by Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer,

the report was a thorough and tough-minded review of research related to written composition.

The typical study which they examined focused quite directly on teaching issues, addressing such questions as

--Will writing improve more if teachers mark every error, half the errors, none of the errors?

--Will writing improve more in classes with 30 students, 25 students, 20 students?

--Will students write better after a unit on outlining? or on topic sentences? or on using more vivid verbs?

The list of 'promising practices' to examine in this way is endless.

At first blush, such a direct focus on teaching seems practical and helpful. How nice it would be if the researcher could go to the teacher and say, "Change this and this, and the writing of your students will improve." But unfortunately it did not work out that way; the answers that these early studies provided were for the most part trivial or inconclusive, and often they were both.

These early studies were making two assumptions which recent work suggests were unfounded. The first assumption was that we understand the characteristics of good writing, and can summarize these characteristics by talking about such things as topic sentences, outlines, word choice, or (more recently) "syntactic" or grammatical complexity.

The second assumption, which follows directly from the first, is that to improve instruction we need only discover what is "missing" in students' writing when compared to "good" writing, build a unit to teach that missing

characteristic, and writing instruction will thereby have been improved.

There are still some proponents of this view, and many teaching practices enshrined in composition texts unconsciously reflect its assumptions. But there has been a powerful shift away from it in recent work. Instead of a focus on the end product, there has been a new concern with the process involved in creating that product.

This emphasis came about in part because of the discovery that our descriptions of the product, "good writing," were not accurate. In a 1970 study, paragraphs drawn systematically from professional journals and published letters-to-the-editor were compared with traditional methods of paragraph development drawn from composition texts. Fewer than half of the paragraphs used any of the traditional methods, and of the nine traditional methods only two were used to any appreciable extent—development by giving reasons for a general statement, and development by giving examples for a general statement. Similarly, "Begin your paragraphs with a topic sentence" is a typical guideline on paragraph development; yet a 1974 study found that only 13% of the expository paragraphs of contemporary professional writers began with a topic sentence; [another 3% ended with the topic sentence;] another 3% ended with a topic sentence; fewer than half of the paragraphs had an explicit topic sentence at all. Findings such as these suggested that there was sometimes something fundamentally wrong with our conventional wisdom about the nature of good writing.

The use of outlining, another technique enshrined in the composition textbooks, has also been questioned. Recent studies of how successful writers

go about writing suggest that very few make an outline at all, and that if they do the "outline" is more likely to consist of brief notes as reminders of things to mention than of carefully organized headings and subheadings, all carefully lettered and numbered.

My approach in writing the present paper is fairly typical. The paper began as a series of notes about recent studies, scattered rather sloppily across a sheet of yellow note paper. The studies were clustered into four sets (instead of the three focuses of the final paper), and came in a different order than that which I finally adopted. After making that page of scattered notes, I wrote a first draft—not following the notes, but using them to remind me of the issues that I had not discussed yet. Only after the first draft was written did I assemble anything that resembled a formal outline. (At that stage, the outline served both as notes to speak from and as a way to tidy up the draft, highlighting irrelevancies and generally tightening up the argument.)

In recent years, a number of different researchers have turned their attention away from the parts of the writing product toward the steps in the writing process. Typically, their studies have focused on a relatively small number of writers who can be studied intensively instead of a large number who can be led quickly through a standardized experimental procedure. These studies have ranged from first grade through experienced college writers, have posed a variety of tasks, and have used a variety of observational techniques. As you might guess, the findings are often highly detailed; there is a problem of distinguishing the significant from the trivial. There are two threads which run through most of them, however, that I find particularly helpful and worth sharing.

When writing is studied as a process, it is quickly apparent that the process has a number of distinct stages. At the simplest level, these include prewriting, writing, and editing. Prewriting is the time during which information is gathered and ideas played with. It may include reading, talking, and simply thinking about a topic. Sometimes it includes an incubation period when initial thoughts are set aside and allowed to coalesce without conscious attention. In real life situations, it can extend for weeks or months. The writing stage is when the topic is developed on paper. Getting started on the writing stage is often difficult and painful, producing many false starts and discarded openings. At this stage the concern needs to be focused on the ideas which the writer wants to express, laying out the argument and its implications, or the basic scenes and storyline in fiction.

It is important to note that this stage of the writing process involves a discovering of meaning rather than a transcription of a meaning that is in some sense waiting full-blown in the writer's mind. Our language provides a whole panoply of devices that not only convey our meaning to others, but help us develop the meaning for ourselves. These devices take many shapes: they include the buts and the ands and the althoughs that relate one set of information to another; they include the basic syntactic relationships of subjects and objects and predicates; and they include structural devices that underly larger stretches of discourse--such things as time sequence in narrative, or generalization and supporting detail in exposition.

In our concern with language as a way to express an idea we tend to overlook the extent to which these devices help us generate new ideas " at the point of utterance," whether in speech or writing. This is perhaps clearer if

we think of a complex algebraic problem. All the terms of the problem are present in our mind, but it is not until we set them down on paper and carry through the steps that we reach an answer. Writing about a complex or unfamiliar question is very similar, though the devices for working out the meaning are linguistic rather than mathematical. (This may be why outlines are not very helpful to most writers. The outline constrains us, keeps us from following up on the insights that we gain as we use language.)

The third stage of the writing process is editing, polishing what has been written to share with a wider audience. This is the stage for attention to mechanical errors, spelling, punctuation, usage, handwriting. It can also be a stage for fine tuning for a particular audience or to achieve a particular tone. In professional writing, this stage involves the work of an editor, who brings a detachment which is hard to obtain when trying to look at ones own writing, and whose contributions can be very substantial.

The details of these stages differ depending upon the type of writing involved, the age and ability of the writer, and the familiarity of the material being written about. But even given this variability, recognition that the writing process has distinct stages provides a useful perspective in examining classroom practice. Do we allow concern with mechanical correctness to interfere with the writing stage, when there are other and more difficult tasks? Do we short-circuit the brain-storming and reflection needed in prewriting, insisting that students "get down to work"? Do we demand neat and tidy first drafts, allowing little room for the students to discover new ideas as they write--new ideas which if they are to be developed usually require that earlier parts of an essay be discarded and reworked?

Another important thread that runs through studies of the writing process is the recognition that errors are a natural part of learning, and are often an indication of progress and growth, rather than of a "mistake" that needs to be erradicated. Errors of this sort have been most clearly recognized in studies of children first learning to use language. It is very common for an infant learning standard English to use an irregular verb form, "Spot ran away," and then a few months later to say "Spot runned away." Studies of such children have shown that what happens is that the child initially learns the form "ran" through direct imitation of adult speech, before learning the more general rule for adding the "ed" sound to form the past tense of a wide range of verbs. When children do start using the general rule, they overgeneralize it to irregular verbs that they previously had used by imitation. In a few more months the child will go back to "Spot ran," using it now as an exception to a general language pattern rather than as simple imitation of a general form.

The perspective reflected in this example has proven to be a very powerful one, and can be profitably extended to studies of written language development, both in reading and writing. The concern with understanding error has become an integral part of the process approach, as distinct from the product approach.

Table 1 summarizes the approach to error implicit in a focus on process and contrasts it with the approach implicit in a focus on product. As the table makes clear, the difference in the two approaches effects not only the questions that the researcher asks but also the strategies that the teacher adopts. Two very different philosophies of education are involved: in one the student is

treated as a passive recipient of the accepted wisdom (in this case, the standard language); in the other case the student is given a constructive role, as a learner who actively makes hypotheses about the nature of language and tests these hypotheses through use.

The notion of error provides a bridge to the next general issue that I want to discuss, that of how to evaluate student writing.

Ask a set of educated adults to correct a list of algebra problems, a science test, or a vocabulary quiz, and the marks that result will be virtually identical. Give the same adults some samples of student writing, ask for a mark between 0 and 100, and the grades will scatter widely. (When I asked an audience of educators to grade Kim's and Stuart's essays on "drought" in this way, the marks ranged from 65 to 95, and were spread fairly evenly along the continuum.)

If instead of asking for a grade, you ask that errors be marked and totalled up, the variation between adults will usually be reduced but it will by no means disappear. Standards of usage vary from situation to situation, and adult language users differ considerably in what they consider "acceptable."

Systematic studies of what adults do when evaluating writing samples suggest that there are a number of distinct factors which influence their judgment:

1. The ideas expressed--richness, soundness, clarity, relevance
2. Mechanics--usage, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling
3. Organization and analysis
4. Wording and phrasing--vocabulary maturity and breadth

5. Flavor or style--characteristics such as sincerety, forcefulness, dogmaticism, sentimentality, pretentiousness
6. Handwriting.

All of these factors enter into most people's judgment of a piece of writing; what makes the scores come out differently is that we can make different judgments about the importance of the factors in comparison to one another. My handwriting is illegible enough that only my closest friends even attempt to decipher it; I therefore tend to give very little weight to handwriting in judging the quality of writing. (But I do make a concession to the fact that it may matter more to others, and I type everything, even my rough drafts.) For some people, and legend has it particularly for English teachers, mechanics are central; misspellings and run-on sentences doom any paper to the bottom of the pile.

For anyone concerned with standardized assessment of student achievement, these differences are a nightmare. There are three different ways out of the problem, each encompassing a wide variety of specific alternatives: standardized objective tests, analytic scoring, and holistic scoring.

There is no such thing as an objective test of writing ability. But it is relatively easy to construct objective tests which are highly correlated with writing ability and which are relatively good predictors of success in later writing courses. In general, objective tests of reading comprehension, of vocabulary, and of English usage correlate highly with writing ability, though they are not direct measures of it. And because of the ease with which they can be administered and scored, there is a strong temptation to substitute them for direct measures of writing. There are two problems

with this approach. First, such tests do not measure the "higher" skills in writing, those involved in developing an idea and organizing and structuring an extended piece of writing. If a usage test represents "writing" in an evaluation of the curriculum, a teacher will do better to concentrate on usage exercises than to ask the students to write an essay. In fact something of this sort seems to have happened in American schools during the late 60s and early 70s. The College Board dropped a writing sample, individual subject areas moved toward objective testing instead of essay writing in their school exams, writing skills were tested at the level of mechanics. Commonsense would suggest that in such a situation students would learn their mechanics, but since they were rarely asked to write, they would not learn to organize their thoughts much beyond the sentence level. And data from the first two rounds of the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggest that that is in fact what happened. In the second round (1974), there was little problem with mechanics (in spite of the fact that public criticism of writing usually focuses at that level)--but there was a deterioration in higher level writing skills, as reflected in such things as the use of appropriate transitions.

Concern about the curriculum spin-offs of excessive reliance on objective tests has helped to reverse this situation. The writing sample has been restored to the College Board exam; professional journals are filled with discussions of teaching writing in English classes; and there is a new interest in writing in the other subject areas.

Which brings us back to the problem of how to score an essay reliably. For a long time, the analytic approach was most popular. This involved specifying relatively objective features of a piece of writing, and then rating or counting them up for each essay. You might count spelling errors, for example, or measure breadth of vocabulary used, or rate a paragraph as having or not having an appropriate topic sentence. Such analytic approaches can be highly reliable, but they are also very tedious and time consuming, and leave you at the end the values problem implicit in the factors mentioned earlier--because mechanics are accurate, is accuracy in mechanics an adequate stand-in definition of "good" writing?

Holistic scoring provides an alternative approach, and has been developed in greatest detail by the Educational Testing Service. Holistic scoring relies upon an experienced reader's intuitive sense of the adequacy and effectiveness of a piece of writing. This is the synthesis that we make automatically of all of the components, from mechanics and handwriting to ideas and organization. ETS gets around the problem of different emphases on the underlying factors by careful training sessions, in which groups of readers discuss the reasons for their reactions and work toward a consensus. Essentially, it is a process of socialization, coming to agree on a common group understanding of "good writing." ETS studies have demonstrated that the process is reliable and quick--far more expensive than objective testing, but not as expensive as analytic scoring. If two samples of writing are gathered from each student, and each is scored twice, it is easy to get reliabilities in the .80s.

The problem with holistic scoring is that it finesses the issue of standards; good writing becomes in effect what a group of experienced readers agree is good. The scores that result allow us to compare performance over time, or between students at a given point in time, but don't tell us anything

about the characteristics of that performance. The information has no diagnostic significance; it is not usefully anchored as a measure of "competency"; and it does not help us understand the strengths and weaknesses of a particular instructional program.

The most promising alternative to the ETS procedures is one developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In the first round of writing assessment, in 1969, NAEP relied fairly heavily on an holistic measure, and were criticised for the lack of useful information that that yielded. The alternative which they developed for the second round is still holistic in application, but with a tint of the analytic mixed in. What they did was recognize that if the purpose of a piece of writing is sharply defined, then there are a limited number of strategies that a writer can adopt in completing the task. The National Assessment examiners labelled these characteristics "primary traits," and developed scoring guides that reflected how students dealt with each aspect of the writing task.

In an essay discussing the statement "A Woman's Place Is In the Home," for example, one of the primary traits concerns the types of evidence that the student uses. The scoring guide contains a list of six categories of evidence: conventional wisdom, personal experience, authority, analogy, history, and legal rights. Each of these is illustrated with examples from student work. The essays are then scored as containing or not containing each of the six types of evidence, as well as for the overall organization and for the purpose of the appeal (in the sense of supporting one or the other side of the argument).

Primary traits scoring is descriptive rather than evaluative; it recognizes that there may be more than one appropriate way to approach any given writing task. The difficulty with primary trait scoring is that the scoring system is specific to the individual question. A new scoring guide must be developed each time the essay topic is changed, and developing the guide is expensive and time-consuming. For the National Assessment exercises, the developers estimate it took 60 to 80 hours of professional time for each question, and that does not count the time involved in administering and scoring pilot versions of each test item. National Assessment does release its exercises and scoring guides for public use, however, and is willing to help states and large districts adapt them for their own use.

Evaluation, of necessity, focuses on product rather than process. Yet it is interesting to note that primary trait scoring is closely aligned with a process approach to understanding the product. The first priority isn't to label one writing sample better than another; rather it is to understand the different strategies that students use in approaching a writing task. It may well be that one strategy is more successful than another for a particular task, but a strategy inappropriate for one task may be ideal for another. There is a separation of the description of what the student seems to be doing from the judgment of whether that strategy is best or not.

The last topic I want to discuss falls generally into the area of inservice teacher education. If we are concerned about the teaching of writing and want improvements in the schools, how do we go about it?

Here again recent years have seen a shift from product to process.

During the 1960s, tremendous energies were devoted to curriculum reform in the sense of sequences of materials and instruction. School districts and

state departments of education formed curriculum committees that produced 1000-page guides to the English program; national curriculum study centers funded by USOE developed K-12 programs for the English language arts. Teacher involvement was stressed, both in developing the new curricula and in testing and modifying the materials in the field. But the structure of the curriculum came from the subject area rather than from the needs of students in the classroom, from analysis of the knowledge to be gained rather than from analysis of processes involved in gaining that knowledge.

As a nationwide effort at educational reform, these curriculum oriented efforts failed. Once the development work was over, only a small handful of the materials became available nationally, either through commerical publication or through distribution by a professional organization. And those few that did become available were neither much better nor much worse than materials developed independently by the major educational presses.

The real impact of the efforts at curriculum development, whether for a school district or as part of one of the federally funded centers, was on the individuals involved in it. They benefited from the sharing of opinions--and disagreements--that shaping a curriculum demands, and they went on to change and improve their teaching as a result of the process they had been through.

Today there are a number of writing programs which similarly seek to involve teachers in direct consideration of alternatives in teaching writing, without necessarily seeking to produce anything so static or monolithic as a curriculum. Perhaps the most successful, and certainly the largest, of these efforts is the Bay Area Writing Project, sponsored by the University of California at Berkeley, with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Carnegie Corporation and the California state legislature. This project now has a series of satellite projects at other sites in California and in

other states, and a new name--the National Writing Project.

The instructional model underlying the Bay Area Project is relatively simple. Each summer, some 25 successful teachers are invited to participate in a six week program of writing and discussion about writing. The most successful of these teachers become teacher consultants for the project, and help run inservice programs in other schools and districts. The project office negotiates with school districts in setting up the inservice work, structures the meetings, and invites various teacher-consultants to lead specific sessions. Though the organization is simple, there are some relatively radical innovations inherent in it.

--It assumes that experienced, practicing teachers have acquired a fund of legitimate knowledge about the teaching of writing, knowledge that can be usefully shared with other teachers. Therefore, the teachers come to the summer sessions as university fellows, not as students, and there is no "curriculum" and no instruction geared at telling them "this is the way to teach writing."

--It assumes that one of the best ways to learn about the writing process is to be immersed in it and then to a talk about the experience. Therefore a major component of the summer program involves the teachers in expository and narrative writing, which they polish and discuss in small working groups.

--It assumes that teachers who have become excited about the teaching of writing and who have been forced both to defend their own approaches and to seriously examine other approaches will continue to develop after the summer session is over. Therefore there is no Bay Area Writing Curriculum, and no interest in building one.

Instead, the Bay Area Writing Project stimulates the change process, provides teachers with the resources and breadth of experience to initiate sensible change, and trusts their professionalism and interest to carry that change process through to an effective conclusion.

There are of course other alternatives. In many school districts, teachers are turning back to the familiar grammar handbooks which have lain idle on the shelves for the the last 10 years. Warriners English series, the dean of the handbooks, has been enjoying booming sales of its latest edition. And the major educational publishers are scrambling to involve national leaders in the teaching of English in the preparation of new series of composition texts. Those texts will undoubtedly sell well, and some of them will approach composition as a process rather than simply a product. Yet the history of educational reform suggests that effective change requires more than a new textbook; it has to begin with the recognition that education, too, is a process, complex, frustrating, exciting, and ultimately dependent upon the understanding and expertise of the individual teacher faced with the individual pupil, rather than upon the sequence of materials we present in a book. The Bay Area Writing Project offers us one model that recognizes and accepts this complexity; the challenge for us is to use this model or to develop better alternatives as we seek to bring about the changes we would like to see in our schools.

Table 1

Approaches to Error

Issue	Product Approach	Process Approach
Why study errors?	To produce a taxonomy of <u>what</u> errors learners make.	To produce an explanation of <u>why</u> a learner makes an error.
What is the attitude toward error?	Errors are "bad." (Interesting only to the theorist.)	Errors are "good." (Interesting both to the theorist and to the teacher, and useful to the learner as active tests of hypotheses.)
What should we do about errors?	Attack the individual errors and eliminate them through drill to produce overlearning.	Understand the source of errors: the rule-based system that produces non-standard forms; provide data for new rule formation.
What can we discover from errors?	The source of failure: those items on which the learner or the program failed.	The strategies which led the learner into the error.
How can we account for error?	Error is a failure to learn the correct form.	Errors are a natural part of learning a language; they arise from learners' active strategies: over-generalization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete rule application, hypothesizing false concepts.
What are the goals of instruction?	Eliminate all errors by establishing correct, automatic habits; mastery of the Target Language.	Assist the learner in approximating the Target Language, support active learning strategies, and recognize that not all errors will disappear.

Adapted from Barry M. Kroll and John C. Schaefer, "The Development of Error Analysis and Its Implications for the Teaching of Composition." Paper presented at Conference on College Composition and Communication, Kansas City, Missouri, March 1977. [ED 145 482].

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1. Street

To an outsider nothing seemed extraordinary about the landscape around Tarleton. The sun was shining and there was a slight breeze, just enough to rustle the leaves on the trees in the fields were men working, cutting cauliflower and tilling the ground which had been harvested. it was all very nice to a 'townie' but I could see that there was something wrong with the plants. I went down to the cauliflower fields with my uncle and we stood in the middle of the field staring at the crop. I looked down at the cauliflowers and saw they were undersized and the hearts were small and dull yellow, the leaves were green and limp. I looked at my uncle and saw him get out his large knife and slash at all the plants around him. He said just one word, "Useless." I felt really ashamed about the whole matter my uncles whole life was farming and all his crops were dying it was almost like part of him lying out there withering in the sun and dust. So I ceased to care as

from for a while and go down south to see how it was there.

One ~~~~ Monday morning I packed a few clothes and got a bit of money, ~~~~ said goodbye ~~~~ to the family and drove off.

As I drove along the motorway towards kent I thought about my job at the mill, they'll be missing me by now, its ten o'clock my friends might cover for me though. ~~~~ Oh forget it ill be back in a couple of days.

I turned off the ~~~~ motorway about twenty miles ~~~~ from London I drove about seven miles from the turn off until I came to a suburbian type of place call it Queensfield it was the sort of place where out of work ~~~~ go to retire I was driving ~~~~ along through this place when I saw something unbelievable, there was a middle aged man on his front lawn watering it with a hose pipe. I stopped the car and stared in ~~~~ amazement I got out of the car and rushed up to him "What are you doing?" I asked angrily "Well I'd have thought that was obvious!" he said "But don't you know about the

drought?" I asked impatiently

"Oh yes but that only affects the arable farmers don't it I mean what farm can this wide bit of water do eh?." he replied.

"On my farm we've been waiting for rain for two months the parents and the mains supply even if it means the cold dip and have one you watering your lawn just because it looks good you stupid get!"

I was so mad I could have bet him I got into my car and drove off. I was getting low on fuel so I stopped at the next garage and filled up. While I was there I asked where the nearest farm was I found out it was four miles away in a place called Beddington or Lower.

I arrived at the farm ten minutes later. And I was talking to the owner. I've come from up north. near Preston and we're having a rough time with the weather. I wonder how is it down here?" I asked

"Well just see for yer self." I looked out on a landscape even worse than ours the plants were wilted so much they could not stand upright any were crisp as a fragile.

Seems it's the same all over then doesn't it.

Kim

The Drought

I can't really remember life without a water shortage, I was only about three years old when the great drought came. I can remember going on a very long journey and settling here where I am now.

I have never seen rain falling from the sky the only large amount of water I have ever seen is the sea. That I have heard rumours about, they say that the sea will dry up in about a year and then where do we go? I don't know.

We all live in what perhaps you reading this would call a commune, of about seventeen people. We have a scientist here who knows how to change salt water into fresh water, so like we are some of the lucky ones. Even so, water is severly rationed, and punishment for stealing water is banishment from the commune. We live about half a mile from the beach I don't know the name of the place as people don't like to talk about the old world. I have lived here for the past twelve years and I am alone. I lost my parents somehow, I don't know how, I don't even really know how I got here.

We live as well as we can, every one is allocated jobs some run the piece of land on which we grow corn and vegetables and wheat. My job is to look after the horses, as we have no transport of any other kind, so it is a job of great responsibility. We have one stallion, one mare, two fillys and one colt the fillys and colts have been bred so that we will have more horses when these ones die. Most of the water goes on these

things as well as a few cows and some pigs.

They were right. The great ocean has at last dried up. We are on our last water stores but the end is eventually inevitable. Each of us knew this would come and we have had a good run for our money. Thirteen whole years I guess this had to be the unlucky one.

Louisa my friend looks so frail I know she will soon be gone. Even the milk has dried up — the cows have died.

The commune leader has told us we must go on trying and living because we might get a reprieve in the end. I am past trying. Why did this have to happen to us.

Today is the last day the scientist has used the last of his chemicals to make some pills which will bring death quicker and less painfully. The whole commune is to gather in the main building at twelve noon when the sun's ~~was~~ at its highest.

Here we are the priest has finished talking to us and we ..... whats that noise outside pitter-patter-pitter-patter everyone rushed to the window and then out of the door it was Rain the RAIN had come!